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The Pulpit Message

Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Philadelphia, Pa.

Quenching the Fires of Hate

Discourse by

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Rabbi Henry Berkowitz, Congregation Rodeph Shalom,
Philadelphia.

Atonement Day 5680—Oct. 4, 1919.

"The leaves of memory seem to make a mournful rustle" as we turn their pages on this Atonement Day. There are some chapters out of the Past we would be glad to forget would but the present permit us. We should be glad to forget all those direful events of the centuries when the fires of hate were kindled against us. Like some ghastly nightmare happily gone, is the record of those ghoulish scenes of the Middle Ages when the pillaging Crusaders raged through Germany. France and England and everywhere set the fagot to the homes of the Jews and enacted such scenes of cruelty as beggar description.

Lest the memory thereof should die out there are hanging in the National Gallery at Madrid, in Spain, huge paintings of scenes of the Spanish Inquisition. There is depicted the great assemblage held when Charles II in 1680 culled out a holiday in honor of his young bride and kindling the fires of hate celebrated an Auto-da-fé by burning at the stake some unhappy Jews found guilty of the heresy of practicing the Jewish Religion. We were ready to forget the horrors of those six long centuries, during which these terrible deeds were done, when alas! the torches of hate kindled in the modern world the fires of the Russian Pogroms.

We thought the climax had passed, when lo! the mighty conflagration of the world war encircled in a ring of fire and sword the eleven million Jews of Eastern Europe. And still the fires of Revolution burn on in many lands. Their flames have spread far and wide. Jews are massacred by Poles; Ar-

menians are massacred by Turks; Koreans are massacred by Japs, and Negroes are lynched and burned at the stake by Americans.

The First Cardinal Sin—Murder.

The ancient Rabbinical teachers summarized all the evil doings of men in the simple category of "three cardinal sins." These are, "The shedding of blood, adultery and idolatry. But the vice of hatred," said they, "outweighs all three." (Mid-rash Tehillim, 52.2). We have witnessed more of the shedding of blood than any generation of the past. A trail of blood flowed from that assassination at Sarajevo in June, 1914, and made its way in mounting torrents across the battle-fields of the world—the shambles in which seven millions of men were slaughtered. Poison gas and liquid fire, those fiendish inventions of modern science, were the fumes and flames of these fires of hate. Who will count the hosts of the maimed and broken sufferers whose blood was shed in this war, of the innocent babes and women, the decrepit and aged who are perishing now with typhus and starvation? Oh, what a year we have passed through! The black plague of the Middle Ages, sweeping the war zone spread from land to land in the form of the mysterious influenza and decimated the ranks of our youth. Great God, when will these beastly crimes end? How long shall our hearts be wrung with terror? Verily it is time for humiliation and prayer and a summons to all the world to make atonement for this first great cardinal sin.

The Second Cardinal Sin—Adultery.

In mentioning the second cardinal sin—adultery—one must speak with bated breath. Someone has truthfully said: "After all, the greatest harm that Germany did the world was to confuse moral issues we thought immovably established." You will recall the shudder that ran through the Western world when it came to our knowledge that under



the cloak of patriotism, women were coerced or cajoled as "War Brides" to violate the seventh commandment. What an uncovering of the secret sins took place in our own land when the military examinations showed 5.4 per cent. of our men diseased. The splendid Welfare Work of the Camp Community Service, as described to me by Mrs. Falconer, was directed largely against the insidious dangers from the women camp followers. We dare not forget in this hour of confession the shame of our city when the Federal government at League Island Navy Yard felt compelled to take the control of affairs out of the hands of our local Police Department. Indeed our Government since the close of the war has begun a new war, here at home, through a nation-wide health crusade for the protection of the generations unborn.

The Third Cardinal Sin—Idolatry.

Idolatry, the third cardinal sin, is not obsolete today. Alas, for how many Gold is an idol and Greed a Religion! It was Germany's greed for land and power that embroiled the world in war. Yet the old bargaining and self-seeking motive is asserting itself as strongly among the Allies. Whether it be in the larger issues of settling the new boundaries of new nations or in the nearer exactions of profiteering and rent-gouging, the same old quality of human nature rules. It has well been asked: "Is the corporation which charges 100 per cent. profit in these days of strain a whit less governed by the Teutonic philosophy? Are the railroad workers of Great Britain who tied up the nation's traffic bringing starvation and distress to millions, less ruthless of the rights of others? Is the retailer who gouges his customers; the striker who demands 'less work and more pay' while millions of people the world over are crying for succor; the millionaire who tries to evade his income tax; are they displaying any less greed? Hasn't the Union which breaks its contracts put itself into the 'scrap of paper' class? Hasn't the politician whose votes weigh heavier than his principles sold his birth-

right for a mess of pottage? Haven't they all lost the war to Germany?"

The Vice of Hatred.

When the "Hymn of Hate" was sounded in that land millions took up the strain and as it were, danced about the fires that were kindled. They lighted new fires whose flames spread from land to land, from people to people, until the whole wide world was set ablaze. The three cardinal sins of Murder, Adultery and Idolatry are indeed outweighed by the Vice of Hatred, for it is the animating spirit in them all. It is the greed that gloats in the robbery of the weak. It is the lust that dishonors the innocent. It is the passion that desecrates and destroys the sanctity of life.

The fires of Hate are raging as never before. They threaten to consume the world. Those fires must be quenched ere it is too late. There is only one force than can quench those flames by dominating the human heart and that is the force of True Religion. Out of the midst of the fires of Sinai thundered the divine mandates: "Thou shalt not murder!" "Thou shalt not commit Adultery!" "Thou shalt not covet!"

True Religion.

These eternal principles are foundation stones of the Temple of the True Religion. Let one of them be moved and the structure must fall. The walls of that Temple have been built slowly by the steady advance of the great principle of human freedom first announced at Sinai: "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of bondage." The supports of that Temple are the pillars of Justice and Brotherhood. "Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor and not bear sin because of him. Thou shalt not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. I am the Lord!" As the great over-arching dome that shall complete that Temple the Prophets gave us their glorious precepts for the guidance

of human history; to put an end to war, to establish arbitration among the nations and to prosper the world in amity and peace.

As from the midst of Sinai's fires came these the sublimest spiritual ideals the world knows, so from the midst of the fires of hate that blazed to the zenith in this world war there has come forth the greatest deed in the history of mankind: The Covenant of the League of Nations. This is the first concerted effort to quench the fires of hate that have blasted the world. It aims to put a curb upon the passions of men by demanding that Reason be set before Violence. It is the solemn pledge of thirty-three nations to establish a court for the arbitration of their differences. It is the first sane method proposed for reducing armaments and halting the rage of war. It is the first attempt to give the weak a chance to be heard and their wrongs to be righted.

A New Covenant.

Here is the hope and dream of Religion cast into a workable form. What though it be human and imperfect—so too was the Constitution of the United States and yet that has given us the first real workable democracy. It is hard to conceive how men, at least religious men, can seek to thwart the great purpose by opposing the League and opposing it when they have no alternative to offer. Without the League we shall have a renewal of the mad race for armaments with the crushing burdens of taxation and the kindling of new fires of hate with endless wars to come.

It is maddening to see how our Senators act. Upon their action hangs the welfare of the world. Nero fiddled while Rome burned. They orate while the fires of hate devour the peoples. We are in the midst of a great industrial revolution. Capital and labor stand arrayed. In this great Covenant of the Nations provision is made, for the first time in history, for a great International Industrial Commission through which the Governments shall engage to take up and seek to

eliminate those sources of unrest, ill will and animosity which are filling the world with trouble. Here is a proposition to handle on international lines the great moral issues that lie back of the suppression of the White Slave traffic; the sale of dangerous drugs; the prevention of disease; the beneficent labors of the Red Cross and other great constructive measures which no one nation alone can, but all unitedly must control.

The Prayer of Words and That of Deeds.

It is maddening to find petty men flooding the country with such literature as the pamphlet of one Eugene Thwing, who denounces the League as immoral and irreligious because forsooth the sessions of the Paris Conference were not opened with daily prayer. Evidently he can only pray in words and knows nothing of the greater prayer in deeds. Theo. Parker once said: "When the men gathered at Independence Hall in Philadelphia in 1776, rose up to the great act of prayer and prayed the Declaration of Independence, all the nation said 'Amen.'" And now that the leaders of the nations gathered in the Peace Conference in Paris have risen to the great act of prayer and prayed the Declaration of the Interdependence of the Nations—let all the world say "Amen."

True Religion Triumphs.

In his speech at San Francisco September 17, 1919, President Wilson uttered out of the depths of his soul, this profound and stirring peroration: "My fellow citizens. I believe in divine Providence. If I did not, I would go crazy. If I thought the direction of the disordered affairs of this world depended upon our finite endeavor, I should not know how to reason my way to sanity. But I do not believe there is any body of men, however they concert their power or their influence, can defeat this great enterprise, which is the enterprise of divine mercy and peace and good will." These words of the President strike into this hour with start-

ling directness. We call this "The Day of God." It comes to lift the burden of doubt and confusion from our souls with the reassurance of our faith that "All's well!" There is a God who rules and His law of Right and Justice is invulnerable. The President says he believes that. Do you? Misguided and mistaken men, abusing their free will, have tried, in each generation, to break the divine laws, but in vain. True Religion steadily triumphs over false. True Religion admits of but one kind of hate, nay commends it, i.e. hatred of evil. "Hate the evil, love the good, establish justice in the gate" is the command of the great Prophet, Amos (V-15). The Scriptures overflow with this teaching. But they also warn: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart" (Lev. XIX). The great sin of the ages has been that men hated not the evil so much as they hated him they held to be the evil-doer. Yet in the long reaches of history in "the thousand years" of God that "are but as yesterday when it is past," we behold how mercy, good will and peace emerge triumphant. The crusades ended ignominiously; the inquisition died down in shame. A single instance will illustrate this truth. July 5th, 1099, is a dreadful day in Jewish annals. On that day the Crusaders at last stormed the walls of Jerusalem and entered the holy city. They drove before them the helpless and panic-stricken Jews. They barred them into the Synagogues and kindling the fires of hate burnt the poor helpless victims to death. Contrast with this that glorious Hannukah Day, December, 1917, when General Allenby at the head of the British and Allied forces entered the city of Jerusalem and brought to an end the misrule of the Turks. His first care was the safety of Jews, Mohammedans and Christians alike. Official Proclamation was made that all creeds were to be respected alike, the sacred places of all three great Religions forever safeguarded. Thus does the great work of redemption go steadily onward and the divine law of Retribution reveal its workings in human history.

The sole question of this hour for you and for me is this: "Will I help or will I hinder its progress?" The appeal of

the Atonement Day is that we use the freedom of will and sense of moral responsibility with which God has endowed us to work with Him for good and not against Him for evil. This is a day of reckoning for each one of us. We have not been guilty of any of the three cardinal sins, but we have shared in the world's sin and who is there among us that has not nursed the fires of hate in his heart and fed the flames with the fuels of greed and passion? How often have mercy and good will and peace come knocking, but in vain, at the doors of our hearts!

An Ancient Parable.

An ancient Parable of the Midrash tells of one oppressed by the weight of Sin who went forth to seek by what means he might find atonement. He wandered afar and sought out the Halls of Learning where Wisdom sat enthroned among her disciples. Drawing near, in humility he asked, "Tell me, O Wisdom, what shall the sinner do to be purified of his sin?" And Wisdom answered: "Evil pursueth the sinner." (Prov. 13:21.) He must suffer for his sin. Saddened at heart he wandered on. In the open market place a Prophet with earnest words was admonishing a throng of hearers. Making his way forward he found the moment to ask of the Prophet: "What shall the sinner do to be purified?" The Prophet made reply: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:4.) In deep sorrow the wanderer continued his search. He came to the Halls of Justice and appealed to the Judge. The Law was cited: "Let the sinner bring sacrifice and make restitution." (Lev. 1:4.) Eagerly the suppliant hastened to fulfill this practical measure. In deeds of justice and kindness in gifts to the orphan, the widow, the helpless and the indigent, he found a new comfort and strength. Still deep in his soul rankled the hidden sense of his wrong doings. Passing the Temple of God, he entered and seeking out the Priest at the altar he ardently asked: "How shall the sinner be purified?" Gently the priest made reply: "God doth not seek the death of the sinner, but only that he return to Him and live." (Ezek. 18:32.)

The Parable Applied.

Let each apply the parable to himself. It cites the progressive steps of atonement, shame, remorse, restitution and repentance. Wisdom speaks out of the solid experiences of life its solemn warning that the inevitable penalty of our sins is suffering. With the first consciousness of sin comes the pang of shame. Whether the world finds us out or not the haunting sense of the evil is there. Therefore let us be warned: "Cease to do evil, learn to do right." (Isaiah 1:16.) Prophecy—peering beyond mere experience into the mysteries of the soul truly admonishes, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." No man has done wrong, but thereby he has dulled and deadened his conscience, warped and stifled the nobler impulses of the soul. Who that comes to realize this vital truth for himself, but is filled with keenest remorse. Under the impulse of shame and remorse we eagerly seek some practical means of atonement.

"Torah."—The Law directs us to practical measures of justice and mercy to save our soul life from decay. We need to heed them this year more than ever. Cries of distress come across the seas that no living soul dare deny. As the curtain is lifted from European lands, scenes of appalling and tragic suffering are revealed we must all help to relieve. Here at home the call for aid is more urgent than ever. We are proud of the great advance of our Federation of Charities during the past year. But we are scandalized to learn that thousands who pledged themselves during the "drive" to contribute have not yet honored their pledges. We now have 53 institutions to support and no man or woman or child can make a true atonement today who is guilty of shirking his share of the common duty. To make our atonement complete each one of us must go a step further. We must sincerely repent. We must heed the divine voice whispering in our souls: "Seek me and live! saith the Eternal." (Amos V:6.) "To live" does not mean merely to feed and sleep, to toil and rest, to suffer and enjoy. Care for the life of the

body, but neglect not the life of the immortal soul! We center our time, thought and energy upon that which fades and perishes instead of upon what is imperishable—upon food and drink, money and pleasure, instead of upon that which has to do with character, conduct, the ideal and the spiritual. We set all other interests first—Religion last. Let us this year make a true atonement with God. “He hath told thee, O man, what God doth require of thee, only to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.” (Micah VI:8).



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